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Why Likud Needs the Peace Process

by Marshall J. Breger and Steven L. Spiegel

Pro-Israeli opponents of the Oslo accords tend to see the peace process¹ as a giveaway by which the Jewish state relinquishes land and the Arabs only make promises which can easily be withdrawn. Commentators like Norman Podhoretz believe the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has not yet reconciled itself to a peaceful path and only wants the fruits of diplomacy to better enable it to attack Israel from a strengthened position in the future. Those who take this position often refer to the "strategy of phases" that the PLO adopted in 1974. As Podhoretz tells it, "What this plan proposes is that the destruction of Israel be pursued incrementally, with the Palestinians first getting what they can obtain through diplomacy, and then, at the opportune moment, making a bid for the rest through armed assault."² Other skeptics such as Frank Gaffney focus on the maps of Palestine which include all of Israel that the Palestinian Authority (PA) frequently displays.³ Douglas Feith argues that "Oslo, over time is more likely to result in war than in peace."⁴

This analysis leads some critics to believe that delaying the negotiations is a good idea, for delay gives hope that something will turn up, stalling the process, and allowing the Israeli government to pay lip service to Oslo without actually fulfilling its requirements; Feith asserts that "this has at times seemed to be the Netanyahu government's real policy."⁵ Others go further and call for Oslo's repudiation. Thus Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America, argues that the status quo may be better than Israel giving land to "hostile Arabs. . . . Some problems are not solvable," he concludes.⁶

But both these approaches are mistaken. Despite its doubts, Likud should support the peace process, for this is the best way to achieve its aim of promoting Israel's security. But how is it to be convinced of this? Most arguments in favor of

1 By "peace process" we mean not just the specific terms of the Oslo process (whose specifics have evolved over time) but the wider effort to affect a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

2 Norman Podhoretz, "The Perils of Peace," *National Review*, Dec. 21, 1998.

3 Frank Gaffney Jr., "Peace Process Dwindles and Icy Currents," *Washington Times*, Jan. 30, 1998.

4 Douglas J. Feith, "A Strategy for Israel," *Commentary*, Sept. 1997, p. 26. In a Jan. 1999 article in *Commentary*, Feith extended this analysis to the Wye Accords, see "Wye and The Road to War," *Commentary*, Jan. 1999.

5 Feith, "A Strategy for Israel," p. 27.

6 *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, Mar. 21, 1997.

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the peace process (by Israel's Labor Party and its sympathizers) often fall flat with these skeptics (the Likud Party and its supporters),⁷ who tend to find their points mushy, altruistic, and naïve. We therefore shall argue that delaying the peace process has two consequences that Likud finds extremely negative: it obstructs Israel's foreign relations; and it inhibits Israel from focusing its energies on combating the real existential threat to its survival—weapons of mass destruction being developed by its enemies. First, however, we review some assumptions and bring them into line with current realities.

MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS

The goals of diplomacy. To begin with, the time has come to redefine the focus of Middle East diplomacy. The Arab-Israeli peace process is no longer about peace. "Peace" normally refers to reconciliation, normalization, and even integration, the end of interstate conflict, hostility between individuals, and a focus on common interests and new patterns of behavior in such areas as commerce, diplomacy, and politics. If this were what negotiations were creating, Shimon Peres's concept of a "new Middle East" would be appropriate. But it is not. Israel's then-leaders over-promised and created a too-ambitious set of expectations (unending security for Israelis, ever growing prosperity for Arabs) that could not possibly be achieved—at least not in the short term.

Instead, the negotiations are about the region's critical danger: limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and long-range missiles to rogue regimes. Debate over the details of the Palestinian Authority obscures this much greater threat to Israel. The Palestinian issue must be resolved expeditiously to address the growing danger of weapons of mass destruction. Seen in this light, those who wel-

come delays in diplomacy are shortsighted.

Strategic depth. Many who oppose the peace process do so on security grounds, but their arguments are outdated. The traditional Zionist imperative that security requires the control of territory is no longer valid. The threat of Syrian artillery returning to the Golan Heights, for example, was a critical Israeli security concern before the advent of missiles; but today, missiles fired from hundreds of miles away can cause more damage to Israel than an attack from the Golan. If an Israeli physical presence on top of the Golan once provided the only means to view the Syrian plain for early warning of Syrian troop movements, today satellite and other monitoring technology exists that was only science fiction in 1967. For these reasons, the Golan plain is far less indispensable than previously.

Similarly, missiles and weapons of mass destruction render the West Bank less important than in decades past. Contrarily, stable ties with Arab states, to coordinate with them against weapons of mass destruction, take on new urgency. As Mark Heller points out, peace settlements will facilitate Israeli deterrence by creating an atmosphere which reduces support for attacks against Israel in the region and thereby creates an environment in which mistakes and miscalculations are less likely to occur.⁸ This insight should alter the Israeli perspective on a Palestinian state.

But some Israelis are so fixated on land that they have missed this change in the geopolitical environment. Before becoming prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu suggested that the acquisition of a nuclear weapon by the Arab states would leave the conventional rivalry intact and thus continue Israel's dependence on the land defenses which Judea and Samaria provide.⁹ He reverses the likely conditions: if an Arab state does acquire nuclear weapons, the threat to Israel would certainly increase, and it would become even more difficult when

7 For simplicity's sake, we call these the Labor and Likud positions, fully aware (1) that elements of Likud have accepted the Oslo process and (2) that those who reject Oslo comprise a range of political factions.

8 Mark A. Heller, *Security Watch*, a publication of Israel Policy Forum, Nov. 1998.

9 Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World* (Bantam: New York, 1993) pp. 282-284.

other Arabs acquire biological or chemical weapons. This regional hell would leave Israel operating from a much weaker perspective. Instead of the relatively stable cold-war balance between two powers, Israel would be forced to confront a variety of dangers coming from different directions.

Weakening Arafat. May 4, 1999, is the date when, according to the Oslo accords, a final deal is supposed to be struck. If serious talks are underway, Arafat will more likely agree to a delay while the parties work their way through the final status talks. (He will likely agree to a delay because of the Israeli elections.) But if the status quo drags on, he will have little choice but to declare a state, for he will feel acute pressure to show the concrete benefits from Oslo. If Arafat unilaterally declares a Palestinian state, the Netanyahu government has indicated that in response it would annex other territories, or at the least, close them to Palestinian entry, terminate all employment of Palestinians in Israel, and effectively trap the Palestinians in their new mini-state. This confrontation would likely lead to another *intifada*; Egypt and Jordan may withdraw their ambassadors; Jordan might offer safe haven to rioting Palestinians—precipitating a downward anarchic spiral that could well lead to a regional war.

Terrorism. Many in the Likud camp believe that the peace process itself leads to an increase in terrorism, as Hamas and other opponents of a negotiated accord seek to disrupt diplomacy with violence. They point to official Israeli statistics, which indicate more Israelis were killed in the five years after Oslo than in the fifteen years prior to the accord (279 deaths to 254). But these statistics in themselves tell little about the impact of the peace process.

First, one can argue that without the peace process, Palestinian terrorism would have increased yet more (due to the population's even greater frustration). Indeed, Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein points out that the number of Israeli victims in the six months before and after September 1993 was almost identical, but that the number shot up after the March 1994 attack on Muslim worshippers in Hebron by the

anti-Oslo Israeli extremist Baruch Goldstein. He concludes from this that suicide bombings were begun not to thwart the Oslo accords but in revenge for the Goldstein massacre.¹⁰

Second, Palestinian terrorism against Israelis is not growing rapidly. In 1997, for example, there were thirty-six Israeli deaths, the lowest number since 1992, the year before Oslo (when the number was thirty). In 1998, Palestinians killed twelve Israelis (of course even one is too many). We cannot ascribe these lowered numbers specifically to the peace process. They may result from Israel's security services figuring out how to prevent suicide bombings, from Palestinian and Israeli security cooperation, or from luck.

Third, while the peace process has not and cannot completely extinguish terrorism—and it is unrealistic to expect it to do so—the best way to fight terrorism is to involve Arabs in this campaign. A collapsed peace process makes such involvement less likely. In March 1996, presidents Clinton and Mubarak presided over a regional antiterrorism conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. With the decline in the peace process, however, no similar meeting has again occurred.

Fourth, there are reasons against tying the terrorism to Oslo. The attacks on tourists in Egypt or on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were not primarily motivated by opposition to Israel. No one knows the precise reasons for terrorist actions, or how much they have to do with stopping the peace process, taking revenge against previous Israeli actions, freeing Palestinian prisoners, acting out frustrations, internal Palestinian politics,¹¹ or some

Likud should support the peace process, for this is the best way to achieve its aim of promoting Israel's security.

10 Danny Rubinstein, "When the Terror Really Began," *Ha'aretz*, Sept. 28, 1998.

11 On this point, Danny Rubinstein in "A Fight for the Palestinian Heartland," *Ha'aretz*, Oct. 23, 1998, writes that "Hamas opposes political negotiations and the peace process, but

combination of these factors. It is therefore fallacious to argue that the peace process created that danger or that failing to pursue the peace process will resolve it.

Arguing about the reasons for terrorism is beside the point. For Israel to be deterred from a policy in its interests by the possibility that such a policy might result in more terrorism is to place Israel's decision-making on security in the hands of Arab extremists. Instead, Israel must decide what is best for its own security. If the peace process is, as we argue, in Israel's greater long-term security, then it should be pursued simultaneously with a war on terrorism.

Also, Israelis should fear not so much present-day terrorism but what is to come. Today's terrorist causes only limited carnage, for his arsenal is limited. Yet the technology already exists to carry biological or chemical weapons in a suitcase. In addition, Palestinian hatred could grow even more venomous. Note how ideologically wrought Armenians, some eighty years after World War I, harry and assault Turkish diplomats, killing and wounding dozens.

Democracy. Prime Minister Netanyahu has argued that because democracies rarely, if ever, go to war against each other, Israel's security is best assured by the emergence of Arab democracies; he has sometimes hinted that these are prerequisites before his government will offer specific peace terms. But this is a stalling tactic; Israel in 1977 did not rebuff Anwar as-Sadat because of Egypt's lack of democracy, nor Jordan in 1994, nor overtures from Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, and Morocco. By the time the Arab states become democratic, the region may well be awash in weapons of mass destruction. Further, if recent trends in such diverse Arab countries as Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan are an indication, increased democracy might enhance the role of elements opposed to the peace process. Opponents of Oslo often argue that the reason not to move on the Palestinian track is the danger of rogue re-

gimes. Just the reverse: the more emphasis one places on the dangers of Iran and Iraq, the more reason to move on the peace process.

Islamism. The argument that peace must wait for Islamism to decline is also disingenuous. Of course, Islamists present a danger to regional stability and engage in terrorism against Israel. But significant forces within Palestinian society wish to resist Islamism, not least of all Yasir Arafat and the PA. Islamism has no better chance of prevailing in the Palestinian entity than it has in Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco. That said, Islamism in large measure draws its strength among Palestinians from the extensive social service network it supports—day care centers, summer camps, hospitals, and medical clinics. These make Hamas a living presence in Gaza and the West Bank. Only when Palestinians feel an economic and political stake in the peace process will its military wing atrophy.

Palestinian intentions. Likud worries that—no matter what the Palestine Liberation Organization says to Israelis and Westerners and whatever treaties it signs—it does not accept the permanent existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East but uses diplomacy as part of a “strategy of phases” to destroy Israel. Likud's worries result from the admittedly many examples of extremist Palestinian rhetoric. When Arafat refers to the model of the Prophet Muhammad's ten-year peace treaty at Hudaibiya with the tribes of Quraysh (which was followed by his taking over Mecca a year and a half later), he naturally raises fears that the PA plans to break its agreements with Israel when political expediency permits. More broadly, Arafat has sometimes appeared to hint that the PLO wants only the fruits of the so-called peace process, the better to enable it to attack Israel when it is stronger sometime in the future.

Even if the Palestinians intend to destroy the State of Israel, they do not pose an existential threat to the state's survival—even under the worst case (an implacably hostile Palestinian state without constraints on its military and foreign policy). The Palestinians are simply too

its people act according to considerations independent of the timetable of the peace process. It appears that internal Palestinian politics are the central element driving Hamas activities.”

weak a foe. Indeed, the guts of the argument over Palestinian intentions, as almost every critic recognizes,¹² is the fear that the Arab states will use Palestine as a launching pad for terrorism, tanks, and planes. But this danger will materialize only if two conditions hold: the Arab states resolve to destroy Israel no matter the cost and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) engage in a unilateral disarmament, neither of which is remotely likely. And, it needs to be emphasized: a "rejectionist front" against Oslo has much better chances of forming without a Palestinian entity than with one.

Opponents of an energetic peace process need to think of what the Middle East might look like without it. If the peace process does not go forward, it will go backward—into chaos and violence. In addition to other dangers (such as economic decline), two stand out: Israel's diplomatic isolation and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

DANGER I: ISRAEL'S DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION

Standing still has a devastating impact on Israel's relations with the outside world.

Jordan. Israel's real strategic borders are not the Jordan River or the boundaries with any future Palestinian state, but rather Jordan's boundaries with Iraq and Syria. Strategic depth for Israel lies not in Judea but in the integrity of Jordan's borders; a stable Jordan as part of a moderate bloc and at peace with Israel means Jordanian land and air space are denied to potential aggressors.

What if the Palestinians violate their commitments to Israel and invite Iraqi troops to their territory?¹³ Prime Minister Netanyahu has

raised this prospect: "Palestinian sovereignty," he has said, "will allow for the entrance of an Iraqi army and for the positioning of Iranian missiles."¹⁴ Nor does A. M. Rosenthal of *The New York Times* interpret this point correctly. Fearful that an "alliance between Saddam Husayn and the Palestinians" is "not about to go away," he warns (seemingly forgetting about Jordan) that "every Israeli general staff will have to prepare for the likelihood that if other Arab armies do mount another attack on Israel, Iraq would move in troops and armor through Palestinian territory."¹⁵ But the Iraqis could only reach the West Bank by traversing Jordan. That means the Palestinian invitation would amount to a declaration of war on Jordan as well as on Israel. It strains credulity to think that a Palestinian leader would take on these two states; logically, he first must overthrow or undermine the Jordanian government before inviting Iraqi troops. Therefore, the danger is not who controls the West Bank but who controls Jordan.

Having established the critical importance of Jordan to Israeli security, the next question is easy to ask and to answer: What can Israel do to strengthen the current regime? Instead of marking time, Israel should vigorously promote the peace process and economic development in Jordan.

It is therefore a mistake for Netanyahu to

Debate over the details of the Palestinian Authority obscures the much greater threat to Israel posed by weapons of mass destruction.

raeli interests by diverting attention that should go to the far greater WMD threat.

14 Cited in Meron Benvenisti, "The Countdown to May 1999," *Ha'aretz*, Sept. 24, 1998. In a pre-Rosh Hashannah interview, Netanyahu was asked what danger a Palestinian state would have for Israel. His answer, "tanks and armor in Palestine," can only imply that he expects Jordan to provide safe passage to Israel's enemies, thus joining the ranks of the so-called "confrontation" states. See also, "CNN Late Edition," Oct. 25, 1998; "Meet the Press," Oct. 25, 1998.

15 *The New York Times*, Mar. 3, 1998.

12 Including both Podhoretz, "The Perils of Peace," p. 38, and Feith, "A Strategy for Israel," p. 26.

13 This scenario in itself is farfetched, however: (1) If the Palestinians invite Iraq to the West Bank or Gaza they risk the destruction of these areas by weapons of mass destruction should Israel and Iraq go to war. (2) Why should Iraq even send troops to the West Bank when Baghdad will find it much easier to attack Israel from a distance with missiles? The scenario of Iraqi troops entering the West Bank jeopardizes Is-

talk as though Jordan would collapse if the Palestinians had a state. Instead, he should build up the importance of Jordan, taking care always to consider how his moves affect Jordan's position.

Other Arab states. Without a vibrant peace process, Israel returns to the diplomatic isolation of old. Indeed, as the peace process has declined, so have Israel's nascent relations with Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, and Qatar. Most of the multilateral talks have stopped, and economic summits have collapsed. Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Moussa warns that the peace process stalemate means that a regional "deterioration [that could lead to war] . . . has already begun."¹⁶ As in years past, Israel is cast in the role of "assumed enemy" in Egyptian army maneuvers.¹⁷ When it appeared in February 1998 that the U.S. would go to war with Iraq, an Israeli journalist made a plaintive plea that Israel deserved a seat at the war table and lamented that the United States and the Arabs excluded Israel from any part in the policy planning process.¹⁸ Here, too, Israel's isolation from matters crucially tied to her existence results from the collapse of the peace process. The new Middle East looks dangerously like the old, with Israel

once more a pariah.

Turkey. While Turkey's secular military has little sympathy for the Arab cause against Israel, this does not mean that it can completely ignore this issue. Thus, the rapprochement with Israel could take place only after the Oslo accords were signed. Some, like Daniel Pipes, argue that the polarization in Tur-

key between the secular military and the Is-

lamists means that the state of the peace process has little importance to Ankara.¹⁹ We believe this is wishful thinking: yes, the two countries have a wide range of common interests (maintaining close ties to the United States, security issues with Russia and Syria), but the fact remains that Turks maintained some distance from Israel until the Oslo accords were signed.

Should Oslo collapse, the Turkish military may not be able to sustain the growing ties with Jerusalem. It makes no difference how many aircraft "rehab" contracts Israel signs with the Turkish military, lacking a peace process the Turkish relationship with Israel may well atrophy. A hint of this standoffishness came after Prime Minister Netanyahu touted an Israel-Turkish defense axis as the "basis, though not the exclusive basis, to form a regional framework." Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Barlas Özener, immediately scotched this idea, pointing out that there can be no regional security framework without peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors.²⁰ Mesut Yılmaz, Turkey's prime minister, then underscored that Oslo provides "a golden opportunity to reach joint goals in the region."²¹

The European Union. Reluctantly, the European Union (EU) recognizes that the United States leads international efforts to broker the Arab-Israeli peace process. France and other states make noises about involvement, but they rarely poach on this U.S. preserve—which is to Israel's benefit, as they would not serve as honest brokers. For example, the EU has already forced Israel to allow the export of Palestinian produce under conditions it does not want, and EU research funds were held up pending Israel's implementation of Wye. If the peace process is delayed or collapses, these would-be mediators can say Washington has failed and find an opening to replace it.

Russia. With Yevgeny Primakov, a Soviet-era Arabist, serving as prime minister of Rus-

By the time the Arab states become democratic, the region may well be awash in weapons of mass destruction.

16 *Ha'aretz*, Oct. 4, 1998.

17 *Ibid.*, July 7, 1998.

18 Hirsch Goodman, "Move Sooner, Not later," *The Jerusalem Report*, Feb. 1998.

19 Daniel Pipes, Letter to Editor, *National Interest*, Spring 1998, p. 122.

20 *Ha'aretz*, English edition, Sept. 3, 1998.

21 *Ha'aretz*, Sept. 9, 1998.

sia, there can be little doubt that Moscow, however few its assets and however great its domestic problems, will focus on making trouble in the Middle East. And this, too, will be facilitated by the peace process coming to a halt.

The United States. But of all the deficits to Israeli relations with other countries, the impact on relations with the United States is the most severe. If the peace process stops, this also hurts American interests and so, inevitably, Israeli relations with Washington. As they devote too much time and energy to debating comparatively minor points, such as those involving the details of Israeli withdrawal, the United States is forced to choose between Israel and the moderate Arabs. This not only makes it more difficult to concentrate on real issues, such as weapons of mass destruction, but it brings out differences between Washington and Jerusalem at a time of delicate peril when they should be working together. As the WMD threat grows, potential aggressors against Israel are far more likely to be deterred if Israel maintains strong and amicable ties with Washington.

As for Iran, Muhammad Khatami's landslide victory in the May 1997 presidential elections and his subsequent statements render possible an improvement in Iran's international behavior.²² But the current diplomatic stagnation inhibits the possibility of improved U.S.-Iranian ties. Thus are strategic options toward Iran impeded without a peace process. Also, if the U.S. government hopes to disrupt terrorist networks such as Usama bin Ladin's, it needs widespread cooperation from regional states, a hopeless goal if the peace process is defunct. As Charles William Maynes has underscored, "we cannot make serious progress in the fight against terrorism without the help of other governments. Yet, without progress in the peace process, many governments will hesitate to join us in taking tough steps because they fear the reaction of their own populations."²³

22 For more on the subject, see Shahram Chubin and Jerrold D. Green, "Engaging Iran: A U.S. Strategy," *Survival*, Autumn 1998, pp. 153-169.

23 Charles William Maynes, "Fighting Dirty Won't Work," *The Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 1998.

Contrarily, the latest U.S.-Israel security agreement, announced November 1, 1998, shows the benefits of advancing in the peace process, for this agreement resulted directly as a consequence of the agreement at Wye Plantation a few days earlier.

DANGER II: WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The spread of WMD. Israel has always faced an existential threat; once in the form of tanks and planes, it now takes the shape of weapons of mass destruction. Rogue regimes are acquiring a steady supply of advanced arms. In what Israeli officials call "a big step forward" for the Syrian army,²⁴ Russia recently sold sophisticated Comet anti-tank missile systems to Syria and negotiations for the purchase of SA-10 anti-aircraft weapons have resumed. Damascus has acquired large numbers of Scud-Cs from North Korea. An unnamed U.S. government official claims that Syria has an active chemical weapons program as well as armed missiles, warplanes, and artillery shells with the nerve gas Sarin.²⁵ Scott Ritter, the former U.N. weapons inspector, has charged that Iraq is hiding three nuclear bombs which lack only fissionable material to make them operational.²⁶

The Iranian test in mid-1998 of the Shihab-3, a medium-range missile capable of reaching Israel, simply underscores this point. The missile will likely be operational by the end of 1999 and mass production will probably begin less than a year later. At that time, development will begin, with Russian assistance, on the Shihab-4 with a range of 13,000

**The Palestinians
are too weak
to pose an
existential threat
to Israel.**

24 *Ha'aretz*, July 11, 1998.

25 *Israel Wire*, June 28, 1998.

26 *Ha'aretz*, English edition, Sept. 9, 1998.

miles.²⁷ Robbie Sabel, director for disarmament at Israel's foreign ministry, points out that "Iran has developed a chemical weapon capability presumably including poison gas."²⁸ According to one report, Israel's intelligence community now estimates that Iran (buoyed by its November 1998 cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union to expedite construction of a nuclear power plant in Bushire) will have a nuclear capability within two or three years.²⁹ (The U.S. government thinks this will take a few years longer.)

The spread of weapons of mass destruction creates much greater perils for tiny Israel than it faced when a standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union controlled the spread of dangerous weaponry. Advanced weaponry means that no one in Israel lives outside the combat zone. If Middle East states develop weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them, they eventually will be used. This explains why Israelis of all persuasions take a tough line on Saddam Husayn; why Israel is pressing Russia not to sell WMD technology to Iran; and why the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington) has made this issue a priority.

The IDF hampered. Israel's military is trying to recast its defense strategies in the face of shifting strategic threats. Recently retired deputy chief of staff Matan Vilnai has publicly stated that Israel cannot defend itself against surface-to-surface missiles developed by Arab countries and warned that Israel's defense doctrine was no longer adequate in an age of mis-

siles and nonconventional weapons.³⁰ Israel's chief of staff, Shaul Mofaz, is not waiting for a new doctrine. In January 1999, he announced a range of reforms, which included giving the standing army a longer sustained fighting capability to cope with the possibility that surface-to-surface missiles hitting the home front would disrupt an orderly call up of the reserves, still the backbone of the IDF's fighting force.³¹ "In the next war," Mofaz says, "missiles will hit the home front."³² But the IDF finds itself blocked by a political leadership focused on the wrong problems. The security establishment increasingly blames the "political echelon" in Israel of being preoccupied with political issues and not investing "enough effort in these potentially threatening areas."³³

Building a regional alliance against WMD. Some opponents of the peace process argue that WMD threats prove that most states in Israel's general area cannot be trusted, and Israel can rely only on its own devices—with possible assistance from the United States. This is security nihilism that pushes Israel to seek more civil defense, a second strike capability, anti-ballistic missiles, and a reliance on deterrence—but its security will nonetheless diminish as it becomes threatened by worsening regional conditions.

Other critics fail to see the connection. Ephraim Inbar argues that "Arab or Iranian acquisition of weapons of mass destruction will not directly affect the peace process, nor will the peace process affect WMD proliferation." While he agrees that the peace process can help establish an atmosphere inimical to their use, he concludes that "Iranian and Iraqi calculations about whether to use such weapons will not necessarily be affected by the atmosphere."³⁴ This misses the point. Of course, an Israeli-Palestinian engagement will not disarm

27 Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed in October 1998 that the Iranians were developing the Shihab 5 and 6, intercontinental missiles which could reach the eastern seaboard of the United States. A blue ribbon congressional commission on missile threats reported earlier in the year that Iran has the technology and resources to build an intercontinental missile "within five years of a decision to proceed." *The Washington Times*, Oct. 1, 1998.

28 Robbie Sabel, "Russia and Iran: Can Diplomacy and Controls Stop Missile Proliferation?" VIIth Carnegie International Non-Proliferation Conference, "Repairing the Regime," Jan. 11-12, 1999, Washington, D.C.

29 *Ma'ariv*, Dec. 9, 1998.

30 *The Jerusalem Post*, June 30, 1998.

31 See, for example, *Ha'aretz*, *Ma'ariv*, *Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 13, 1999.

32 *Ha'aretz*, Jan. 13, 1999.

33 *Ma'ariv*, Dec. 9, 1998.

34 Ephraim Inbar, "From Camp David to Oslo: A Realpolitik Assessment," *Peacewatch*, Sept. 17, 1998.

the rogue regimes. Rather, the failure to reach an agreement will preclude the United States (and Israel) from encouraging Arab resistance to WMD.

Israel's goal should be a loose (even unacknowledged) coalition of moderate, regional states with the United States and Western Europe in the defense of the present order in the Middle East against this new breed of lethal anarchy. The elements of that coalition were present in the Kuwait war. Premised on the peace process, this coalition then took tender root at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit on terrorism in March 1996. A functioning peace process increases options by creating an environment that frees all sides to concentrate on the dawning regional WMD crisis. But this joint effort cannot take place when Arab governments are worried about their own survival. For most leaders, immediate domestic concerns are a greater daily motivation than more long-term WMD. Therefore, when the peace process is proceeding poorly, they find it more difficult to cooperate with Israel and develop a coordinated strategy against the radicals.

For example, solving the Palestinian problem is in Jordan a matter of national security and Hashemite dynasty survival. Jordan's population is somewhat over half Palestinian, and practically every household has family ties across the Jordan River including the new crown prince. Reacting to the deterioration in the peace process, Islamists and others opposed to accommodation with Israel have grown stronger in their efforts to challenge the king's policy. Thus does stalemate in the peace process weaken the Hashemite government domestically and isolate it from other Arab countries—making it more susceptible to Iraqi influence—precisely the opposite of what opponents of Oslo wish for. Moreover, it keeps the “king's peace” with Israel from becoming the “people's peace.” Ze'ev Schiff, one of Israel's leading military correspondents, suggests that “The danger to Jordan today does not derive directly from the Palestinians. . . rather it derives more from the shock that could come west of the Jordan, if there are violent clashes be-

tween Israel and the Palestinians.”³⁵ Radwan Abdallah, a Jordanian analyst, referring to possible Israeli-Palestinian violence, says “there is no way you could divorce Jordan from it. The majority of Jordanians are Palestinians, and it is bound to spill over.”³⁶ Likud needs to understand the importance of Jordan's stability for Israel's own defense, a defense undermined by a moribund peace process.

Many friends of Israel take umbrage at “linkage” between the U.S. ability to organize a coalition against Iraq and the seeming collapse of the peace process, but such linkage does in fact exist because Arab governments ignore the Arab “street” at their peril—and the “street” reacts according to the temperature of the peace process. More broadly, Arab moderates seeking accommodation with Israel will be discredited, and Islamic extremists will gain in stature if the peace process ebbs. Anti-Israel and anti-American rhetoric will rise, accompanied by calls for Arab league members to sever ties with Israel. Saddam Husayn will be emboldened by the growing Arab sympathy for him. Efforts to limit arms sales to Iran and maintaining sanctions will be weakened.

The financial price. As dangers to Israel grow, its military budget will inevitably increase, with a negative impact on the Israeli economy. Four of the IDF's long-term strategic plans in recent years have collapsed because of fiscal considerations.³⁷ As a consequence, Chief of Staff Mofaz has declared that the IDF faces a “resources crisis.”³⁸ His sentiments are widely echoed. The commander of Israel's air force says his service is in desperate need of additional funding to avoid having

The danger to Israel is not who controls the West Bank but who controls Jordan.

35 *Ha'aretz*, July 31, 1998.

36 *The Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 2, 1998

37 *Ibid.*, May 8, 1998.

38 *Ha'aretz*, (English edition), July 15, 1998.

to ground planes.³⁹ Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai publicly asserted in late July 1998 that if his ministry did not receive an additional 2 billion shekels (\$550 million), the entire defense establishment would be near collapse; and he greeted news about Iran's missile test with reiterated pleas for "crucial resources."⁴⁰ Ephraim Sneh, a parliamentary member for Labor (and a former general), went so far as to argue that the IDF is in as poor a state of readiness as on the eve of the 1973 Yom Kippur war.⁴¹

Maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge when the peace process has collapsed will prove especially arduous (as the bitter argument a decade ago over development of the Lavie fighter jet showed). However much Israel prides itself on military self-reliance, the ever-increasing cost of missiles and missile defense will cripple its military independence. Scholars like Robert Satloff have recognized that the price of the high-tech battlefield is greater Israeli dependence on the United States,⁴² but failed to note the logical tie-in to the peace process.

The strategic imperative. Israel has recently focused on a lesser threat—Palestinian terror—rather than greater threats—deteriorating relations with the outside world and weapons of mass destruction. Prime Minister Netanyahu would respond by arguing that Israel is acting energetically against both terrorism and WMDs, and that they are totally separate. Not so. The time and energy expended over whether withdrawing from 12.1 percent or 13.1 percent of the West Bank threatens Israeli security could have been better spent working with moderate Arab states to contain their extremist neighbors.

The time has come to recognize that weapons of mass destruction pose a central danger to the United States and Israel. Israel cannot

have it all—put off concessions to the Palestinian Authority and wield a full-scale battle against regional states armed with weapons of mass destruction. Without progress on the Palestinian front, an effective and coordinated plan to control WMD will not work. The goal for Israelis and Americans must be to build a Middle East safe from weapons of mass destruction. All policies must be judged by their effectiveness in staving off this looming danger. Plenty of measures exist (weapons, defense policies, deterrence), but none will work effectively without the lubricant of an effective peace process policy. Pursuing the peace process is not a lofty goal or a package of unnecessary concessions; it is a security imperative.

Time is not on Israel's side; standing still entails severe risks. Therefore, Israel must choose and prioritize. It can go forward and deal with the real problems in the area; or backward, and face the devastating consequences of a Middle East without the peace process; but it cannot stand still.

The president of the United States has concluded that the danger of unconventional attacks are the greatest emerging threat to U.S. national security and revealed that this threat—especially the possibility of a germ attack on the mainland United States—keeps him awake at night.⁴³ Anyone concerned with the Middle East must be even more focused on such dangers. Only if the direct linkage between the WMD danger and the peace process becomes clearer to policymakers and publics alike will both diplomacy and security move forward in tandem to create an effective counter to the growing threats the region is just beginning to face.

CONCLUSION

Arabs and Israelis both confront perils as the peace process deteriorates; like Israel, the Arabs face the inexorable strengthening of extremists, the increase in weapons of mass destruction, and the decline of their economies. Contrarily, the Arabs have as much to gain

39 *Israel Wire*, June 26, 1998.

40 *The Jerusalem Post*, July 21, 1998; July 27, 1998; Aug. 3, 1998.

41 *Ibid.*, July 14, 1998.

42 Robert Satloff, "U.S., Israel Still Need Each Other," *Newsday*, Oct. 14, 1998.

43 *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1999.

from the peace process as does Israel—land, economic development, the feeling of justice being served. This being the case, why should Israel bear the main burden to move diplomacy forward? Well, the Arabs did begin to match Israel's conciliatory steps in the 1993-96 period, but the very question is misconceived: even if the Arab side does not fully understand its own interests, this is no reason for Israel to refrain from doing what is best for itself. Not to do so would be to leave vital Israeli security decisions in the hands of other governments. Israel should not wait for others to do what is best for it.

Getting one's priorities right does not mean Israel should give in to every Palestinian demand. There are significant security in-

terests for Israel to protect by requiring the Palestinian entity to forego an army, accept severe limitations on arms, permit Israeli overflights, and Israeli control of sensitive high places (perhaps by lease). Embracing the peace process does not mean being utopian about the security of Israel. It does, however, mean assessing risks responsibly rather than ideologically.

The Israeli Right has several reasons to oppose the peace process, such as religious attachment to the entire "land of Israel," nationalist claims to a "Greater Israel," or distaste for the sporadic autocracy and corruption of the PA leadership, but the security of the State of Israel is not such a reason.



Clandestine Haircuts in Kabul

KABUL—Professional beard trimming is a clandestine business in Taliban-ruled Kabul, where shaving is a crime that can land you in jail or get you beaten. Inside their homes, barbers trim the beards of a brave few who sneak a quick trim while getting a haircut. The ban on shaving was imposed by the Taliban army—Islamic religious students turned guerrilla fighters—after it took control of Kabul in September 1996 and imposed a strict version of Islamic law.

"It is not just women who have suffered under the Taliban . . . men have also borne the brunt," said Zulmair Khan, who was having his beard trimmed because, he said, "hairs come into my mouth when I eat." His frustration surpassed his fear of punishment. "The Taliban can punish me for this, but this long beard—especially when it is untrimmed—really makes my life miserable," he said.

The job was done quickly and only after the barber posted his 8-year-old son as a sentry to watch for patrolling Taliban soldiers. "Don't fall asleep . . . warn us if you see them," said Zahir, who gave only one name. He snipped briskly, worrying his young son would tire of his task and his vigilance wane. "Some men really beg and implore me to shorten their beards . . . so I have to take the risk," Zahir said.

The Taliban's no-shaving edict comes from their belief that the Prophet Mohammed ruled against shaving. Barbers have been given strict orders to not even touch a beard with a pair of scissors because it is "un-Islamic." Taliban leaders also have their own idea of an "Islamic hair style," Zahir said. The forehead should be free of hair so as not to interfere when a man prays and touches his forehead to his prayer mat. Center parting is fine and closely shaved in the back is best. About 1,000 Taliban militiamen patrol the streets, often armed with steel wires, to publicly beat offenders.

Associated Press, Nov. 30, 1998